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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR OBSITNIK'S FEBRUARY 26 MEETING WITH
MINISTER KUBIS

Classified By: Ambassador Vincent Obsitnik, for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary. Ambassador and Foreign Minister Kubis discussed Kosovo, Afghanistan, Missile Defense and Iran on February 26. FM Kubis said the GOS had begun discussions with the Canadians regarding additional deployments in Afghanistan, and that the GOS hoped to be in a position to preview this new commitment by the Bucharest Summit. Kubis also noted that he is planning a May visit to Afghanistan with his Dutch counterpart. Ambassador Obsitnik stressed the need to reject rhetoric that could lead to, or tacitly encourage, violence as a response to Kosovo's declaration. Kubis highlighted the challenge presented by the virtual unanimity of the Slovak political class against Kosovo recognition, but confirmed that the GOS would re-evaluate the situation as the transition unfolds. On missile defense, Kubis underscored his belief that Iran's missile program constituted a threat and noted that both he and new Defense Minister Baska had recently made statements about the importance of Alliance consultations on missile defense. Minister Kubis expressed keen interest in the February 25 signing between the U.S. and the Czech Republic of the VWP security MOU. He said that Slovakia is ready to move to this phase, adding that his Czech counterpart was anxious for the cover (from Brussels' scrutiny) that U.S.-Slovak negotiations might provide Prague. End Summary.

Kosovo

¶2. (C) Ambassador Obsitnik expressed grave concern regarding the false and inflammatory remarks made by Slovak National Party (SNS) leader Jan Slota regarding Kosovo and the United States, and disappointment that no GOS official had denounced them. FM Kubis acknowledged the inappropriateness of the comments, but shifted gears quickly, noting that the "real" problem was the virtual unanimity of the political class -- all parties except the Hungarian National Coalition, (SMK) -- against recognition. Kubis said Parliament rejects the notion that Slovakia should re-examine its policy at the end of the transition period, and could raise objections to Slovak participation in the EU mission and KFOR. Although the Prime Minister had expressed publicly his support for the EU mission in his February 24 television appearance on Kosovo, strong parliamentary pressure could potentially affect his "balanced" stance. Kubis said that he would do his best to work with the EU, and that the transition would provide needed clarity. Stability in Kosovo and in the region, and recognition by a critical mass of countries -- over 100 states -- would create a "different reality." (Comment: In a

follow-up conversation, Acting Director of the MFA Balkans and CIS office, Eva Ponomarenkova, told A/DCM that the bar for recognition had not been raised, and that movement within the EU would continue to play a decisive role in influencing Slovak policy. Ponomarenkova said Fico's remarks had been aimed specifically at the hardline Slovak parliament, and disputed A/DCM's assertion that, by saying Slovakia "might never" recognize Kosovo, it could be harder for Fico to pivot down the line. A lawyer by training, like the PM, Ponomarenkova believes Fico's "maybe" leaves the door wide open. End comment.)

13. (C) Returning to the domestic front, Kubis said he was glad that SMK had backed off a short-lived effort the week of February 18 to amend the Kosovo resolution to permit recognition without Serbia's approval. He also mentioned, with some irritation, Hungarian FM Goncz's call for the OSCE to open a discussion about minority rights and autonomy. Kubis said he was concerned that such initiatives could provoke tensions with respect to the Hungarian minority. (Comment: Kubis was being slightly disingenuous, since PM Fico had explicitly raised the specter of secession by Slovakia's Hungarian minority -- ostensibly as a means of explaining to the public the situation in Kosovo -- in his February 24 television appearance. As has been the case over the past year, the mutually-reinforcing rhetoric of the GOS, SMK, and some Hungarian politicians is creating an unhelpful dynamic that bears watching.)

Afghanistan

14. (C) In response to the Ambassador's query, Kubis said that he had the Prime Minister's approval to pursue "step-by-step" increases in Slovakia's ISAF contributions. The Slovaks intend to deploy a "smaller" core group that can be augmented in the future. Kubis noted that the GOS has been in talks with the Canadians about cooperation. Kubis expressed the hope that plans will have reached a sufficiently concrete stage to enable them to be previewed before Bucharest. Kubis also noted that he and Dutch FM Verhagen were considering a visit to Afghanistan in May.

Missile Defense

15. (C) Recalling Minister of Economy Jahnatek's February 19 comment that missile defense components in Poland and the Czech Republic posed a threat to Slovakia, Ambassador Obsitnik asked if there was any doubt on the part of the GOS that the missile threat was real. FM Kubis said that he, personally, had no doubts about the nature of the Iranian missile and nuclear programs. He added that the threat provided a good "justification for preparations within the Alliance." Following Jahnatek's "personal" remarks, both the Kubis and Defense Minister Baska made statements regarding NATO consultations on missile defense. (Note: also on February 19, the MFA spokesman stated that "...the bilateral project between the U.S. and the Czech Republic and Poland became a topic of discussion in NATO on the construction of a future anti-missile defense. Slovakia, as a member of NATO, has in the past taken part in these discussions and will continue to do so.")

VWP

16. (C) Minister Kubis said the GOS would coordinate with the Czechs on next steps in the VWP process so that Prague wouldn't be isolated on this issue in Brussels. Kubis expressed a desire to work off the just-signed U.S.-Czech Security MOU in upcoming negotiations and reiterated GOS enthusiasm for moving forward as rapidly as possible. (Note: Ambassador Obsitnik will provide a copy of the U.S.-Czech MOU to MFA's point person on VWP, State Secretary Strofova, during their February 28 meeting.)

